Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities
2014-2015 Request for Letters of Interest (RFLI)

Overview

Communities across the United States are turning their attention to smart growth and sustainable development approaches to revitalize their economies, create jobs, protect clean air and water, protect against the impacts of climate change, and improve residents' quality of life. However, when trying to implement these approaches, many communities run into barriers such as outdated zoning codes and other local regulations, lack of consensus around where and how to grow, and misconceptions about sustainable approaches in general. Moreover, many communities lack the technical expertise to implement smart growth strategies and the resources to educate local stakeholders about the environmental, economic, health, and quality of life benefits these approaches can bring.

The Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program will provide technical assistance to up to 25 communities on the use of various tools to help them achieve their goals for growth through a 1- to 2-day workshop on a specific smart growth development topic:

- Bikeshare Planning
- Equitable Development
- Infill Development for Distressed Cities
- Sustainable Strategies for Small Cities and Rural Areas
- Flood Resilience for Riverine and Coastal Communities

Building Blocks tools have helped many communities overcome barriers and move toward smarter, more sustainable growth. As a result of this technical assistance, selected community groups, local governments, and tribal governments will increase their capacity to successfully implement smart growth and sustainable approaches that protect the environment, improve public health, create jobs, expand economic opportunity, prepare for the effects of climate change, and improve overall quality of life.

The Building Blocks program supports the priorities of the [Partnership for Sustainable Communities](#),[1] a collaborative effort among the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to improve access to affordable housing, increase transportation options, and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment. The Partnership agencies coordinate federal investments in housing, transportation, and environmental protection to help communities become more prosperous, healthy, and environmentally sustainable.

For a selected community, each technical assistance workshop will include:

- An option for public engagement (e.g., a meeting or workshop that is open to the public).
- Direct consultation between technical experts and decision-makers whose work relates to the specific challenge to smart growth and/or sustainable growth. These can include planning, transportation, environmental, and economic development department heads; commissioners; senior municipal staff; and elected officials. The relevant decision-makers will vary in each community and will depend upon the tool

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[1] Learn more about the Partnership for Sustainable Communities at http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov.

being delivered. For example, the *Infill Development for Distressed Communities* tool might require meetings with the city manager or mayor, head of the department of economic development, local or regional business owners, local developers, and elected officials.

- A 6- to 8-page "Next Steps" memo outlining options for specific next steps to implement some of the ideas generated during the technical assistance workshop.

Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities is geared toward communities that are relatively new to sustainable approaches but have a basic understanding of smart growth principles and how they apply locally. Communities most appropriate for the Building Blocks program recognize that they have development challenges and are trying to kick-start efforts to address a specific local issue.

Technical assistance to selected communities will be provided over 1 to 2 days and will require some preparation by the community. Communities are expected to participate in 2 to 3 planning calls and complete a community "homework" and data collection exercise to help inform the workshop. Communities will also be expected to participate in one follow-up conference call after the workshop. Assistance will be provided through analysis of the community's prepared materials and homework, presentations, meetings with community stakeholders, and/or activities that educate participants about the impacts of the community's development policies.

The program operates as follows:

1. Communities submit a letter of interest, requesting assistance with a tool and specifically outlining how the tool is relevant to their development challenge. An applicant may request assistance for multiple tools; however, each request must be submitted as a separate letter of interest (that is, one tool per letter).

2. EPA will contact the selected communities to schedule a workshop, discuss mutual expectations as well as roles and responsibilities, and review details about the program. The EPA technical assistance team and the community will participate in at least 2 conference calls before the workshop and a follow-up call after the workshop is complete.

3. EPA's contractors, along with EPA headquarters and/or regional office staff, will conduct a 1- to 2-day visit to the community to deliver the assistance related to the selected tool. This workshop will occur between February 2015 and July 2015. A 6- to 8-page "Next Steps" memo summarizing the results of the visit and potential next steps will be provided to the community within 3 weeks of the workshop.

This is the fourth round of the Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program. Selected communities will help EPA refine these tools, which will eventually be available publicly on the EPA website.

How to Apply
EPA requests a letter of interest from each community that would like to receive assistance. The letter of interest should contain the following information and must be **no longer than two (2) pages.** (Please **do not** submit letters of support, maps, or other supplemental information.)

1. **Identify the ONE tool for which you are seeking assistance.** Select one (1) of the five (5) tools described on pages 5-9. If you would like to apply for multiple tools, you must submit a letter for each tool.

2. **Describe the nature of the smart growth or sustainable communities-related challenge(s) facing your community,** including any relevant data to demonstrate the challenge. If applicable, describe how

this challenge affects low-income, minority, tribal, and/or other communities facing disproportionate environmental or health risks.

3. **Explain the relevance of the selected tool to the challenge(s), being as specific as possible.** Recipients may select only one type of assistance per letter of interest. Communities may submit multiple letters of interest, but the challenge should correspond to the tool requested. Applicants must describe how the community's issues can be addressed through the technical assistance workshop, focusing on why a given tool will help with a specific challenge.

   - **Bikeshare Planning**—Indicate whether your community has done a feasibility study or any other bikeshare-related planning exercises.
   - **Equitable Development**—Indicate 1-3 topics the workshop will focus on (see list of topics on page 6) and how they are connected to the community challenge.
   - **Infill Development for Distressed Cities**—Indicate what, if any, economic development is occurring within your community. Also indicate what steps your community has taken to encourage infill development, including policies, code changes, new partnerships, or other strategies.
   - **Sustainable Strategies for Small Cities and Rural Areas**—Indicate which 3-4 topics the workshop will focus on (see list of topics on page 8) and how they are connected to the community's challenge.
   - **Flood Resilience for Riverine and Coastal Communities**—Indicate whether your community is in a riverine or coastal area and whether you have done any flood mapping.

4. **Describe your plan for engaging traditionally underrepresented communities**, including low-income, minority, tribal, and/or overburdened[2] communities, in the technical assistance workshop.

5. **Describe the community's expected capacity for implementation,** such as local policy change, additional consideration for physical improvements, or new incentives. EPA generally assists communities that are ready for implementation and success once the Building Blocks workshop and Next Steps memo are complete. EPA will monitor progress of next steps implementation; therefore, communities should request assistance only if they believe they have the capacity for implementation. **EPA will follow up with the community after the workshop to determine the impact of the assistance and to inquire about what changes have been made as a result. Selected communities should be prepared to provide this feedback.**

6. If applicable**, describe how this assistance will complement other work the community is doing using other Federal funding**. Specifically highlight:

   - The likelihood that the proposed work will advance the Partnership for Sustainable Communities Livability Principles.[3]
   - This workshop's alignment with a local or regional integrated planning process.
   - The strength of plans for involvement of community residents in the workshop's planning and implementation, including historically underrepresented and overburdened populations.

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[2] An overburdened community is defined as a community with "minority, low-income, tribal, and indigenous populations and communities in the United States that experience disproportionate environmental harms and risks as a result of greater vulnerability to environmental hazards. This increased vulnerability may be attributable to an accumulation of negative and a lack of positive environmental, health, economic, or social conditions within these populations or communities."
http://www.epa.gov/compliance/ej/resources/policy/plan-ej-2014/plan-ej-rulemaking-2011-09.pdf

[3] http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/mission/livability-principles

7. Affirm that the community can provide the information or materials listed in the "What the Community Provides" section.

8. List the primary point of contact and other key stakeholders who will be involved in the technical assistance work, including names, titles, addressed, emails, and phone numbers.

Letters must be signed by a mayor, city manager, elected official, or other community representative. **This signature represents the community's support and commitment to this program and assistance.**

Letters of interest must be submitted in an attachment (Microsoft Word or PDF file) by email to Sarah Dale (dale.sarah@epa.gov) no later than November 20, 2014 at 5:00pm Eastern Daylight Time. If you have questions about this solicitation, please contact Ms. Dale at dale.sarah@epa.gov or 202-564-6998.

Please save your file using the following format: Name of Jurisdiction Name of State and corresponding tool number (#x) based on the following list. For example: Catonsville, Maryland #1.

Tool #1: Bikeshare Planning	Tool #4: Sustainable Strategies for Small Cities
Tool #2: Supporting Equitable Development	and Rural Areas
Tool #3: Infill Development in Distressed	Tool #5: Flood Resilience in Riverine and
Communities	Coastal Communities

Please note that only letters submitted in response to this request for letters of interest will be considered for assistance. No previously submitted letters of interest will be considered.

Selection of Communities
Reviewers will include staff from EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities, as well as each of EPA's 10 regional offices. EPA will also consult HUD and DOT.

Further guidance is available on EPA's website at http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/buildingblocks_faq.htm.

EPA's Role
EPA will hire and manage all contractors. EPA will be integrally involved in all planning, including workshop planning, and will review all materials developed in association with the workshop.

Timeframe
EPA expects to select recipients by mid-December 2014 and provide all technical assistance by July 2015.

TOOL #1: BIKESHARE PLANNING

Communities nationwide are investing in bikeshare to provide people a healthful and environmentally friendly transportation option. This tool will help communities consider establishing a bikeshare system.

Community Benefits

Bicycling is good for people's health, good for the natural environment, and good for local businesses. Bikeshare systems can be a cost-effective means of improving public transit and expanding the number of people who bicycle to their destinations. Communities are wise to consider a number of factors before deciding whether and how to establish a bikeshare system. This tool will provide an overview of how bikeshare works, different types of bikeshare systems, and bikeshare financing options. Workshops will include consideration of community activity centers and employers that might be served by bikeshare and options for how a local bikeshare systems might be owned, designed, operated, and funded. Special consideration will be given to bikeshare as a potential service to people who are economically disadvantaged. Before the workshop, the community will complete a checklist to identify local factors of importance.

Areas of Focus

- Feasibility: Understand which bikeshare systems might be appropriate.
- System planning: Understand tools for identifying service area, system size, and system phasing.
- Business plan: Identify financing, phasing, and management models for bikeshare systems. Learn strategies to engage local partners to explore public-private partnerships.
- System operations: Understand the operational needs for system balancing, equipment maintenance, and related items.
- Health, safety, and social equity: Understand potential health benefits, safety issues, and strategies to ensure bikeshare is accessible to a wide segment of the population.

Who Should Attend:
/ Elected officials.
/ Local government staff.
/ Community leaders.
/ Potential bikeshare system partners from universities, health care organizations, and major employers.
/ Local environmental justice advocates.
/ Interested community members.

How It Works:
/ The community will complete a questionnaire before the workshop.
/ The 1- to 2-day on-site assistance will include an evening public presentation, a morning work session with key stakeholders, and an afternoon meeting with government leaders.
/ Participants will discuss best practices in other communities.

What the Community Provides:
/ Marketing of workshop.
/ Invitations to key stakeholders.
/ Decision-makers' commitment to attend the workshop.
/ Local logistics.
/ Self-assessment.

Outcomes:
/ An understanding of the elements of bikeshare programs.
/ Identification of potential barriers to bikesharing and strategies to overcome them.
/ An understanding of legal, health, and social equity issues.
/ A framework for assessing the feasibility of bikeshare.

Special Considerations:
/ Military bases, national and state parks, and associated communities are encouraged to apply.
/ Communities seeking to expand bicycling among economically disadvantaged groups of people are encouraged to apply.

TOOL #2: SUPPORTING EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

New development and growth are not always equally beneficial to all members of a community. This tool will help communities evaluate their priorities to work toward equitable development.

Community Benefits

Although economic growth and revitalization are common goals in most communities, achieving these goals is frequently accompanied by concerns that new development will displace existing residents, particularly in low-income communities. Equitable development principles provide communities with a path to improve their quality of life and economic opportunities while ensuring that existing residents are not displaced and have full access to the benefits of these improvements. Equitable development is not just about affordable housing; it includes the full range of factors that contribute to residents' quality of life, including access to high-quality employment; safe, walkable neighborhoods; regional transportation connections; environmentally safe and healthy communities; and access to the amenities, services, and institutions residents need to thrive.

Areas of Focus

Each community will receive a self-assessment to help identify its needs and goals, including a step-by-step guide to gathering key metrics in neighborhoods. Communities will pick 1-3 of the following assessment topics for the workshop:

- Preservation and development of **housing** that is affordable to a range of income levels.
- Preservation and strengthening of **commercial business districts** and locally important destinations.
- Access to high-quality **employment** opportunities for local residents.
- Recommendations on addressing **environmental impairments** that impede restoraton of communities.
- Preservation of opportunities for **legacy residents**, businesses, and future generations.

In the workshop, participants will review the assessment findings and identify the tool(s) most relevant to the community's priorities, context, and goals. Experts will also provide options for next steps, including the identification of key community institutions and potential partnerships.

Who Should Attend:
- / Elected officials.
- / City/county staff, including economic development and planning staff.
- / Community and neighborhood leaders.
- / Local environmental justice advocates.
- / Other stakeholders.

How It Works:
- / The community will complete an assessment before the workshop.
- / The one- to 2-day session will begin with a public workshop to gather community input.
- / Consultants will conduct an in-depth session with staff and key participants to review the community's goals and self-assessment, discuss equitable development tools, and match them to the local needs and context.

What the Community Provides:
- / Marketing of workshop.
- / Invitations to key stakeholders, including local environmental justice advocates.
- / Decision-makers' commitment to attend the workshop.
- / Local logistics.
- / Local key contact.
- / Self-assessment and background information on demographics, market conditions, and community issues and concerns.

Outcomes:
- / Knowledge of best practices in equitable development.
- / An understanding of local needs and areas of vulnerability.
- / Identification of strategies to promote equitable growth.
- / Options for next steps and additional data analysis.

TOOL #3: INFILL DEVELOPMENT IN DISTRESSED COMMUNITIES

This tool will help local governments in distressed communities identify obstacles to infill development and strategies for overcoming those obstacles.

Community Benefits

During the post-World War II era, many communities in the U.S. developed into the outer parts of the region, leaving older neighborhoods, traditional downtowns, and central business districts abandoned and underserved. However, in the past 2 decades, some communities have revitalized their central neighborhoods through infill development—redevelopment of vacant land or properties in neighborhoods with existing infrastructure and development. Economically distressed communities, however, have been less able to attract infill development and attain the accompanying economic, health, and quality of life benefits.

Areas of Focus

This tool will help distressed communities that have already identified a priority infill development area and who are experiencing some level of economic growth at the regional level. The workshop will help communities determine their readiness to pursue infill development and identify strategies to attract such development. Each community will complete a self-assessment questionnaire before the workshop to determine which set of strategies will be most appropriate to focus on. This self-assessment will be structured around one or more components, which will also provide the framework for the workshop:

- Policies – Identify new policies that might be adopted or existing policies that could be amended to remove obstacles to infill development.
- Partnerships – Leverage resources, build capacity, and coordinate efforts through public and private partnerships.
- Perception – Improve perceptions of an area to strengthen demand and reduce the perceived risk for lenders.
- Funding – Identify standard and innovative funding options to support development and fund infrastructure.

During the workshop, participants will review the findings of the assessment and national experts will help participants match the community's goals with infill strategies. Experts will also discuss relevant case studies and help identify options for next steps.

Who Should Attend:
- / Elected officials, city manager, mayor.
- / City/county staff, including economic development, transportation, and planning staff.
- / Local developers.
- / Community and neighborhood organizations.
- / Local environmental justice advocates.
- / Other stakeholders.

How It Works:
- / The community will complete an assessment before the workshop.
- / The 1- to 2-day session will begin with a visit to the community's priority development area.
- / Consultants will conduct an in-depth session with decision-makers, staff, and key participants to review local goals, data on the priority development area, the self-assessment, and specific infill development strategies.

What the Community Provides:
- / Marketing of workshop.
- / Invitations to key stakeholders, especially local developers.
- / Attendance of key officials and local government staff.
- / Decision-makers' commitment to attend the workshop.
- / Local logistics.
- / Local key contact.
- / Self-assessment and background information (such as the market conditions) on the priority development area.

Outcomes:
- / Knowledge of best practices and infill development strategies.
- / An understanding of the community's readiness to pursue infill development.
- / Identification of specific strategies to promote infill development.
- / Options for next steps.

TOOL #4: SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIES FOR SMALL CITIES AND RURAL AREAS

This tool, tailored to small cities and towns in rural areas, will help communities closely evaluate their zoning codes, policies, and programs for alignment with smart growth principals.

Community Benefits

Identifying barriers to smart growth in local development codes, programs, initiatives, and policies will help small cities and towns achieve their goals for sustainable development patterns and economic growth. This workshop will help participants understand the basic principles of smart growth and potential changes that could be made to promote compact, walkable communities that encourage investment in existing neighborhoods, while preserving farmland and open space. Participants will develop an initial list of priority areas in their local codes, policies, and programs, and strategies to address the challenges the community is facing.

Areas of Focus

This tool will use sections of EPA's Small Town and Rural Code and Zoning Audit Tool to help communities analyze their local development codes, zoning, and programmatic initiatives. Communities will select 2-4 sections of the audit tool on which to focus and discuss how their goals or efforts so far in these topic areas are interrelated. The audit tool includes 11 sections:

- Strengthen the local and regional economies.
- Engage and connect community members.
- Improve health and promote active living.
- Protect natural habitats and ecosystems.
- Support productive agriculture for a variety of markets.
- Meet housing needs for different ages and incomes.
- Revitalize villages and town centers.
- Preserve historical and cultural resources.
- Provide transportation choices.
- Invest in efficient public infrastructure and operations.
- Increase energy efficiency and provide renewable energy.

The presentations and discussions will focus on implementation issues and strategies, experiences in other rural communities, and resources and tools the community can use to reach its goals.

Who Should Attend:
/ Elected officials and key staff.
/ Community and neighborhood leaders.
/ Builders, developers, and business owners.
/ Landowners.
/ Local environmental justice advocates.
/ Other stakeholders.

How It Works:
/ The community will complete an audit before the workshop.
/ The 1- to 2-day session with community leaders and staff will begin with an overview of smart growth principles and typical disconnects between those principles, community goals, and local development codes and policies.
/ Participants will discuss best practices in other communities.
/ Participants will discuss development challenges during a driving/walking tour of the community.
/ A hands-on working session with local officials will include an initial assessment, identification of options, and a discussion of implementation strategies.

What the Community Provides:
/ Marketing of workshop.
/ Invitations to key stakeholders.
/ Decision-makers' commitment to attend the workshop.
/ Local logistics.
/ Local key contact.
/ Self-assessment and background information for the audit, such as local codes and plans.

Outcomes:
/ Identification of local smart growth goals and options for code changes to implement them.
/ Understanding of smart growth principles and how zoning codes and initiatives can help accomplish them.
/ Options for next steps

TOOL #5: FLOOD RESILIANCE FOR RIVERINE AND COASTAL COMMUNITIES

This tool will help communities adapt to climate change and plan for disaster resilience by auditing local plans, policies, and development regulations. Communities will identify approaches they can take to become more resilient to flooding.

Community Benefits
Many communities are experiencing more frequent and severe storms that result in flooding, even in areas not considered flood-prone. Communities located along rivers are experiencing flooding and the devastating effects of erosion; coastal communities have additional challenges of sea level rise and land subsidence. This workshop will help the community assess its level of readiness for flooding. The workshop will assist the community in identifying options for updating its local plans (such as comprehensive land use plans and local hazard mitigation plans), policies, and development regulations, and applying green infrastructure approaches to become more resilient to floods in the community and the watershed.

While any flood-prone community in a riverine or coastal area could benefit from using this tool, communities that have already assessed and mapped their future risks to flooding and other natural hazards will be in a better position to discuss options and make choices that lead to long-term resilience.

Areas of Focus
Participating communities will be introduced to an expanded version of EPA's Flood Resilience Checklist,[4] which includes strategies to:

- Enhance flood resilience.
- Conserve land and discourage development in river corridors and other flood-prone areas.
- Protect people, buildings, and facilities in vulnerable settlements.
- Plan for and encourage new development in safer areas.

Who Should Attend:
/ Elected officials and key staff.
/ City planning and zoning staff
/ Hazard mitigation and emergency management staff.
/ Local environmental justice advocates.
/ Other stakeholders.

How It Works:
/ The community will complete an assessment tool before the workshop.
/ The 1 to 2-day session with community leaders and staff will begin with an overview of the role of smart growth and green infrastructure in flood resilience.
/ Participants will review the assessment tool results and discuss options for addressing barriers.
/ Participants will discuss best practices in other communities.
/ A facilitated discussion will focus on options for improving flood resilience.

What the Community Provides:
/ Marketing of workshop.
/ Invitations to key stakeholders.
/ Decision-makers' commitment to attend the workshop.
/ Local logistics.
/ Local key contact.
/ Self-assessment and background information for the audit, such as local codes and plans and flood assessment risks/maps (if available).

Outcomes:
/ Identification of current local plans, policies, and regulations that can help the community become more resilient to future floods.
/ Identification of potential strategies to improve resilience, such as green infrastructure.

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[4] http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/pdf/Flood-Resilience-Checklist.pdf